

# LOVE and ATTRACTION

An International Conference

Edited by

**MARK COOK**

*University College of Swansea*

and

**GLENN WILSON**

*Institute of Psychiatry  
University of London*



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# THE PARTICIPATING VICTIM: A STUDY OF SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST PRE-PUBERTAL BOYS

MICHAEL INGRAM

*International Catholic Child Bureau*

It has been noted in recent years (Gibbens & Prince, 1963; Mohr *et al.*, 1964; Burton, 1968; and particularly Virkunnen, 1975) that the legal distinction between assailant and victim in sexual offences does not fully represent the true facts of the case. Children can be seductive towards adults, can participate fully in, and enjoy, sexual acts with them, and can suffer greatly when the acts are discovered and there is a family scene followed by police investigation and court proceedings.

Literature on the subject is sparse, and sometimes confusing in that there is no accepted definition of pedophilia. For some authors it is defined as sexual activity with persons below the age of consent, and for others with persons below the age of puberty. But puberty itself is difficult to define, being a slow, ongoing process. Some children below the age of consent are fully sexually mature with their orientation finally determined; some children approaching puberty can have orgasm and ejaculation of semen before the appearance of pubic hair and deepening of voice. In the present paper pedophilia is defined as sexual activity with pre-pubertal children, and puberty is defined as not having any noticeable pubic hair, or, in the absence of information about this, being under the age of 14 and not yet having a "broken" voice.

## SOURCES OF THE CASES STUDIED

Fourteen of the ninety-one cases studied (15%) were referred to the author by parents or social agencies explicitly because of the sexual activity. Fifty-three (58%) were referred for counselling for other reasons, family problems, school problems, behaviour disorders, etc.; and the fact of the sexual activity was revealed in the course of the counselling. Twenty-four cases (26%) were discovered by the author or his colleagues overhearing conversations in a club or at camp. This study, therefore, differs from previous ones, in that they have normally been drawn from police files or casualty departments of hospitals, or from the records of children's homes – in other words, where the sexual act has been the occasion of a major disruption in the child's life.

The total number of sexual relationships studied was 105 because some boys had contacts with different men, and some men had contacts with different boys, but the number of

relationships must have been far higher than that, especially since one man admitted to having had contacts with over ninety boys, and three of the boys were prostitutes — or at least very promiscuous. The children came from seventy-six families, seventy-one of whom were sufficiently well known to the author to figure in the study. Fifteen cases were excluded from the study. There remained seventy-three children, from sixty-four families, and a total of seventy-nine sexual relationships.

### THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

The average number of children per family was 2.4 boys and 1.7 girls, an average family size of 4.1. (The preponderance of boys in the families is explained partly by the exclusion of families with girls only, and partly by the fact that both effeminate and delinquent boys appear to come from families where there are more boys than girls. It should be noted that many of the families continued to expand, after the child's sexual contact with an adult.)

Table 1. DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY SIZE

Family size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8+
Frequency in the sample	5	6	9	15	8	4	10	4	3

Table 1 shows the distribution of family sizes in the sample.

Seven of the sample were only children, seven were the middle child of the family. Of the children from larger families, twenty-eight came from the older half of the family, while thirty-five came from the younger half. There is a slight tendency for the younger children of large families to be involved, but it should be borne in mind that the families continued to grow in size. The average age at the time of the first assault was 9.3 years, with a range of 6 to 14.

### THE PARENTS

It is difficult to talk about "bad parents" or "bad relationships between child and parent", and in this paper I use the words with great caution. One is bound to be subjective in making such judgemental statements, and one must recognize that some children appear to flourish in multi-problem families. Nevertheless, it has to be said that the families of most of these children seemed to be unsatisfactory. I have tried to restrict myself to objective criteria, and to judgements that, in my professional opinion, the child's normal development was suffering because, at least in part, of the intra-familial relationships. The following criteria were among those used:

1. Material neglect to the extent that the home and child were perpetually filthy, and the child did not receive regular meals, wore clothing that was noticeably worse in condition than that of his schoolfellows.
2. Father drunk and/or violent to the extent that the rest of the family were confessedly afraid of him.
3. Mother having medical treatment for depression and/or anxiety.
4. Father taking no part in the upbringing of the children, mother being the sole disciplinary authority; father evidently despised by mother in front of the children.

5. Mother experienced by the child as rejecting. In many families only one child was rejected.
6. Mother overprotective. This was the most difficult to specify and was only used for extreme cases, like the mother who changed her child's underwear twice a day, or the one who never allowed her children out to play, or those cases where more than one agency complained of mother's constant anxious interventions.

In all only ten mothers and ten fathers appeared to the author to be "satisfactory", and in only six cases were both parents "satisfactory". These data are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. THE CHILD'S RELATIONS WITH ITS PARENTS

	N=64
Father absent	17 (27%)
Death	5
Desertion/Divorce	7
Unmarried mother	5
Father drunken and/or violent	21 (33%)
Father weak/ineffectual	16
Father "satisfactory"	10 (15%)
Mother absent	3 (5%)
Death	1
Desertion	2
Mother rejecting (N=76)*	31 (48%)
Mother anxious/depressed	39 (61%)
Mother overprotective	11 (17%)
Mother "satisfactory"	10 (15%)
Both parents "satisfactory"	6 (9%)

\*Number of children rather than number of parents was taken as the base for this factor, since parents usually, if they reject, reject only selected members of family.

Two parents were alternately over-protective and rejecting.

## THE MEN

It was not possible to number the men involved, as children did not always mention names, out of a sense of loyalty, but thirty-seven were named, of whom the author contacted seventeen. Of these seventeen, eleven were prepared to give information in return for counselling. Some of the children in the group had sexual relations with several of the men, and some of the men had sexual relations with several of the children. Group activity was not uncommon. Only two men were strangers to the children, the rest having professional or other legitimate connection with them, or were members of the family's entourage. I use the word "stranger" only of men who made approaches to the children, not of the "pick-ups" of the three promiscuous boys.

These data are summarized in Table 3.

The eleven men who received counselling from the author showed a striking similarity of background. They had poor relations with their mothers, no relations with their fathers, or were frightened by their fathers, and all seemed to have missed out on the rough and tumble

and gang experience of childhood. They had viewed their own approaching puberty with something of disgust, and were impotent with men and women alike.

They were men who loved children, got on well with them, were successful in their professions and were evidently doing a great deal of good work in the community. They were all anxious that their sexual intimacies with the children might wreck their careers, but complained that the children were so willing, even seductive, that abstinence was virtually impossible.

It is easy to see how men deprived of love as children should find in the unhappy children described above objects of a deep love, and how the deprived children would cling to such men for the love they had to offer. That such relationships should become sexually intimate is not surprising, but I hesitate to agree with those who would describe them as *meaningful sexual* relationships for reasons to be given later.

In other cases, and these involved mainly the men who refused my invitation to make contact, and which often involved group activity, what seems to have happened frequently was that the man showed pornographic magazines to the children, boasted of their own imaginary sexual exploits with women, and then got into sexual horseplay without any open demonstration of affection. The children, on the other hand, looked on these men as models of sexual prowess, and were happy to receive their sexual initiation at their hands. It was only in later years they came to understand the real meaning of what was going on, and came to despise the men with whom they had had such enjoyable experiences. But several children remained in friendly contact with these men throughout childhood, and into adult life.

It will come as no surprise to the reader, therefore, that those who reported the incidents to their parents were among the most disturbed or the least disturbed of the children.

Table 3. CONTEXT OF THE SEXUAL ACT  
(*N*=79, i.e. number of contacts)

Social worker/Teacher	28 (34%)
Clergyman, Choirmaster, Sunday School Teacher	24 (30%)
Youth Leader, Scout Master, etc.	16 (20%)
Stranger	2 (2%)
Older brother	4 (5%)
Grandfather	1 (1%)
Mother	1
Father	1
Family friends	2 (2%)
Promiscuous children picking up strangers for pleasure or reward	3

#### Cases Reported to the Parents

In all cases where the child was assaulted by a stranger (two in the selected group, and thirteen in the larger group) there were violent family scenes, mother crying, or having hysterics, or developing a skin rash, father pacing up and down threatening to "kill the bastard with my own two hands". Police were called in, often on the justification that they must stop the same thing happening to other children. Children were questioned and cross-examined, all this being done in a way that must have been more disturbing for the child than the actual sexual experience. As one psychiatrist put it of one child, "If he had not been bugged by the man, he certainly had been by the police and doctor".

In all six families where there were two "satisfactory" parents, the boy told them both together, but some time after the event. The parents took the admission in their stride. In one they invited the man back to their house and discussed it with him, recognizing the good work he was doing, and allowed the good work to continue, with their son continuing also to visit the club. In two cases the parents told the boy to discontinue seeing the man, and that was the end of the affair; and in three cases the parents referred the boy to the author for counselling. In all of these six cases the sexual activity was unrelated to any lovemaking, and seem to have been isolated instances of the sort of boisterous play that boys of middle childhood often indulge in.

In all eight families where there was one "satisfactory" parent, the child told that parent, who did not discuss it with the other (if any). Three mothers without support from a father sought help from a social agency, and all three boys were referred to the author for counselling. In all eight cases the incidents referred to did not seem to have had much significance, though the boys with absent fathers did seem to allow a lot of caressing from the adult. In all cases the adult was connected with a church or club or both, and no punitive action was taken in three cases; in the other five the adult was quietly invited to resign his post.

The remaining eight children who told their parents were among the most disturbed of the group, and their families the most unsatisfactory. One boy of 11 was never allowed out to play with other children "in case he might meet a dirty old man". His mother was obsessional and anxious, his father brutal and sadistic. A well-meaning social worker persuaded the mother to allow the boy out to join a club in the evenings, and the very first evening he had sexual contact with the club leader, then went and told his parents. The club leader said the boy was affectionate, cuddly and seductive, and that he participated in the sexual activity with great enjoyment.

Another mother hated to hear her children giggling, as she was convinced that giggling could only be caused by sexual pleasure. One mother gave her son two changes of underclothing each day, two mothers were experienced by the boys as alternately rejecting (thinking that all boys were dirty, and they would much rather have girls) and overprotective, for the same reason. The men involved with these two boys claimed that the sexual activity was initiated by the two boys who went home and immediately told their mothers.

The remaining three boys who told their mothers used to have violent quarrels with them often, and relating the sexual act appears to have been a means of hurting the mother. That left fifty-four cases that were not reported by the child. Of these, four boys told their parents several years after the events, and four parents were told by a social worker of the child's activity. The social workers involved helped the parents to take the matters calmly.

### THE NATURE OF THE ACT

The information here may be incomplete, as it is evidently a matter of some delicacy to probe into the raw details.

Most of the men and boys involved in sexual activity engaged in a rather boisterous game that boys of middle childhood commonly engage in, called "knackering", which means grabbing or punching your neighbour's genitals. It sometimes seems to have a sexually stimulating effect, and sometimes I interpret it as an expression of early feelings of male sexual rivalry. Evidently for the men in our study it was a chance of a stepping-stone to something more sexually stimulating.

Apart from "knackering", in every case under consideration the primary act was the man

fondling and stroking the boy's genitals. If the boy responded positively, this would usually lead to complete masturbation of the boy by the man. In six known cases it led to fellatio, in seven to inter-femoral intercourse, in six to buggery (or attempted buggery). In all cases of multiple activities the boy also did things to the man, often quite passionate lovemaking. The author found these boys to be noticeably seductive towards himself and other men. He knows that at least four of them have become homosexuals. Three were either promiscuous or prostitutes at the age of 11. One prostitute was the son of an unmarried mother who hated boys and who went on having children in the hope of having a girl. She never succeeded. One prostitute was living with maternal grandmother, mother and sister, all of whom hated men, having been badly let down by them. The third started earning money from his older brother when he was home on leave from an approved school. While the older brother was away, he practised with other men, until he himself was taken into care. One boy used to be given white mice by his man. He stroked the mouse while the man stroked the boy's genitals. He then masturbated the boy while watching the cat eat the white mouse.

It was less common for the boy to do things to the man than for him to allow the man to do things to him. In all cases reported above of activities other than masturbation, the boy also did things to the man, usually reciprocating. In a further nineteen cases in which the boy took an active interest in the man masturbating him, encouraging him and so on, the boy also masturbated the man. In eleven cases of group activity where the man showed pornographic materials to the boys, and boasted of his sexual prowess, this led to the man masturbating himself in front of the boys, or of getting them to do so.

I found at an early stage that in discussing these matters with boys and men, that I had to point out to them a distinction that they were blurring, that of participating and that of allowing. It was quite clear to me that while some boys allowed the man to masturbate them, they did so solely for the gratification of being fondled. I received a number of reports of boys starting to engage in other activities as the man became more sexually excited, eating, fiddling with the dials of the radio, engaging in unrelated conversation, etc. This is just the opposite of adult responses, and it is for this reason that I found it necessary to suggest to men claiming that there was a meaningful sexual relation between themselves and the boys, that this did not appear to be the case. Meaningful relationship there may have been, but that this was sexual for the boy, I very much doubt, pleasant though it be to have one's genitals stroked by a loving father-figure.

### LOVEMAKING

In sixty-two cases it would appear that the boys were seeking affection, nestling up to the men, wanting to be cuddled by them, sit on their knees, etc. I find this is the case with younger children in homes that I visit where there are problems. It appears from this study, however, that boys of up to 14 are behaving in the same fashion. It did emerge, however, that of the forty-two boys who became distracted when masturbation started, thirty-six belonged to this group of sixty-two, that is, more than half, and these tended to be the younger ones.

Sixty of these sixty-two appear to have kept up a loving relationship with the same man for long periods of time (at least 3 months).

Some cases were reported of boys who, when alone, would indulge in lovemaking, but when with the group, only indulged in the horseplay following looking at pornography and indulgence in "sexy" talk.



## CHILD SEDUCTIVITY

The eleven men who answered an invitation to discuss the matter reported that children are seductive. They initiate sexual conversations, invite sexual horseplay, want to "feel" and be "felt". I have found that very young children sitting on my knee will try to feel my genitals, but have rarely found this sort of seductiveness in older children. So I am suspicious of allegations of child seductivity without encouragement from the adult, and found that some examples of seductivity given were subjective on the part of the adult. The following is a complete list.

1. Boys with long legs and little round bottoms wearing short tight pants. This is clearly subjective, but I leave open the suggestion of one man that some mothers dressed their little boys up in a sexy fashion.
2. Boys using obscene language and sexy conversation.
3. Boys suggesting that the man is sexy, and asking for details of his sex life.
4. Boys laughing at or admiring the man's large genitals (when changing for swimming for example).
5. Boys seeking affection.
6. Boys sitting with their legs apart and feeling themselves with their hands in their pockets.
7. Boys feeling the man's genitals.
8. Boys asking to see the man's genitals, or asking him to masturbate.
9. Boys offering to drop their trousers, suggesting sexual activity, or stating that they would not mind sexual activity.

In the course of 6 years as a teacher in a boarding school, 4 years as a Sunday school teacher and 10 years as a child counsellor and club leader, I have encountered several of the above in relation to myself personally, but only on rare occasions. Unfortunately time and space do not allow further discussion, and I shall have to report more fully on my studies of these elsewhere. Suffice it to say here that I think the claims of the pedophiles I have known do not add up to widespread child seductivity or child precipitation of the activity, but that children who are deprived or disturbed will willingly enter into an atmosphere charged with sexual feeling, and take part in the activity. Several children I have known, and many more reported by pedophiles, indicate that children from perfectly normal and happy homes are also quite capable of doing so.

I feel that in the circumstances violent reaction to the discovery of such activity can do a great deal of harm, while the activity itself evidently performs some function for the child, or fulfils some need, or is a passing act of little significance. Therefore, the response to the act should be calm, and counselling should replace prosecution except where there is violence or sadism or some other reason for intervention by the law.

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